

BU/Malden Reach for the Stars Academy Program Overview

Introduction

The goal of Governor Deval Patrick's *Gateway Cities Education Agenda: English Language Learners' Enrichment Academy Grant* is to close the persistent achievement and attainment gaps that disproportionately affect students in the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities by supporting summer 2014 programs tailored to meet the specific language and academic needs of secondary ELLs. Dr. Amy Cournoyer, author and Academic Program Director of the program, and Dean Hardin Coleman of Boston University School of Education, collaborated with Superintendent Dave DeRuosi and Assistant Superintendent of Malden Public Schools Kelly Chase, to plan and implement the Summer 2013 BU/Malden Gateways for English Language Learners (GELL) "Reach for the Stars" Academy. The overarching mission of the academy is to equip ELLs in Malden with essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will help them to navigate their way to success. The state-funded initiative has enabled BU School of Education and Malden Public School District to forge new pathways in educational partnerships and implement a transformational educational experience for English language learners in an urban school district.

In a program uniquely tailored to meet the specific needs of participating middle school ELLs in Malden, the academy is designed to help accelerate students' English language and literacy skills, expand content knowledge in core subjects, improve overall confidence, motivation and engagement in school, promote critical thinking and increase college and career readiness. Our joint goal is to prepare middle school ELLs in Malden for academic success through a customized enrichment academy in line with WIDA and Common Core standards. According to research, various factors contribute to the academic success of ELLs, such as quality of instruction, teacher quality, parental involvement, and school culture. The Summer 2013 BU/Malden Reach for the Starts Academy aims to promote Malden middle schools' ELLs' academic achievement by developing a comprehensive program that targets these factors. The three key components of the academy include (a) innovative, research-based curriculum and instruction, informed by WIDA and common core standards (b) a professional development/coaching model that encourages critical reflection of theory and practice and is comprised of blended learning opportunities as well as a co-teaching instructional model (c) multilingual parent orientation aimed at increasing ELL parental involvement/student advocacy, awareness and support.

Demographic and Achievement Data

The Malden Public School District presently serves a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic student population in an urban educational context. School report student-level demographic data indicates that the number of English language learners (ELLs) in the district has steadily increased. Presently, over 44 % of students report speaking a language other than English at home, reflecting a linguistic and cultural diversity and richness characteristic of a large urban city.

Among current ELLs in Malden, 22 home languages are represented. Of the 1098 ELLs in the district, students speak Spanish (6.5%), Chinese (9.8%), Portuguese (6.2%), French/Haitian Creole (6.6%), Vietnamese (3.9%), and other languages including Albanian Arabic, Amharic, Cape Verdean, Hindi, Gujarati, Khmer, Luganda, Nepali, Filipino, Pushtu, Russian, Somali, Thai, Tibetan, Tamil and Urdu. Of the student population, 16.1% is considered Limited English Proficiency (LEP), or beginning and intermediate level English language learners.

ELLs in Malden struggle to balance the rigorous demands associated with simultaneously acquiring English and mastering content in various disciplines. In addition to these enormous cognitive demands, other factors such as issues associated with living in low socioeconomic conditions and difficulties integrating into a new culture, pose as obstacles that contribute to the persistent academic achievement gap that disproportionately affects English language learners in Malden.

Data from the 2012 MCAS Report show that the achievement gap continues to disproportionately affect ELLs in Malden. Of all the ELLs and formerly ELLs in the district, 64% failed or needed improvement in English language arts; 56% failed or needed improvement in math; 75% failed or needed improvement in science. At the middle school level (the target population for this proposal), MCAS scores are persistently low for English language learners. For instance, of the 6th grade ELLs and formerly English language learners in Malden, 56% failed or needed improvement in English language arts; 43% failed or needed improvement in math. Of the 7th grade ELLs and formerly English language learners in the district, 55% failed or needed improvement in English language arts; 66% failed or needed improvement in math; 88 % failed or needed improvement in science. Scores for eighth- and tenth-graders were as bad or worse. Of the 8th grade ELLs and formerly English language learners in Malden, 52% failed or needed improvement in English language arts; 57% failed or needed improvement in math; 88 % failed or needed improvement in science. Scores for eighth- and tenth-graders were as bad or worse. For instance, of the 8th grade ELLs and formerly English language learners in Malden, 52% failed or needed improvement in English language arts; 57 % failed or needed improvement in math; 88% failed or needed improvement in science. Scores for eighth- and tenth-graders were as bad or worse.

The majority of ELLs in Malden lives at or below the poverty line and most receive free or reduced lunch. In the district, 54% of the student population receives free lunch and 8.6% receives reduced lunch. Overall, 62.6% of the student population in the district is considered low income.

Most ELLs in the district are first-generation immigrants. Many of these students have had interrupted formal schooling experiences and some are not literate in their home language. A large number of ELLs come from single parent households. Of all current ELLs at the middle school level (the target population for this proposal), 13.4% are in Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) classrooms and 47.6% are in SEI 2 classrooms.

Although some gains have been made in the district over the years in terms of addressing the needs of ELLs, retention and enrollment is still a major area of concern. For instance, the DESE four year Graduation Rate Cohort Report shows 20.2% of ELLs dropped out of school in 2011.

Closing the achievement gap for ELLs and providing opportunities for tailored and accelerated learning continues to be a priority for the district. As indicated in our demographic data, the City of Malden has a burgeoning number of English language learners who struggle academically and consistently perform low on statewide and school assessments. The wide range of ELL backgrounds and experiences necessitates specialized instructional interventions and enrichment programs targeted to meet their unique language, literacy, and learning needs.

Recognizing the critical importance of closing the disproportionate achievement gap for this population, the Boston University (BU) School of Education and the Malden School District have partnered in the design and implementation of a summer 2014 Gateways for English Language Learners (GELL) Enrichment Academy.

Structure and Content of Summer 2014 Program

In this section, the structure and content of the Summer 2014 *BU/Malden GELL Reach for the Stars Academy*, a multi-layered, comprehensive English learner enrichment program is described. The three key components of the academy are (a) innovative, research-based curriculum and instruction strategies, informed by WIDA and common core standards and infused with the Habits of Mind and intercultural awareness (b) a professional development/coaching model that encourages critical reflection of theory and practice and is comprised of blended learning opportunities as well as a co-teaching instructional model (c) multilingual parent orientation and workshops aimed at increasing ELL parental involvement/ student advocacy, awareness and support.

The program is designed to help prepare middle school and high school English language learners in Malden for college/career readiness through an innovative program designed to accelerate their language, literacy, and content knowledge and skills while developing their understanding of Habits of Mind, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness and competence. The overarching theme of the academy is *Navigate Your Way to Success* and all curricular materials, guest lectures, field trips, and experiences built on that theme.

Each of the five week units of study features a Habit of Mind (e.g. Perseverance, Empathy and Listening to Others, Imagination, Precision, and Learning Continuously) as the central, organizing theme. Within each unit of study, students are challenged to meet explicit language, literacy, intercultural awareness/communication, and habits of mind objectives across content areas. In addition, students are explore college and career connections in each unit of study.

Daily Schedule

The daily schedule includes the following array of classes:

- 1) a content-based, integrated skills **language education class** aimed at accelerating students' English language skills and content knowledge
- (2) a **literacy education workshop** that targets the development of students' literacy skills and prepares/debriefs students for guest lectures and field trips
- (3) **lunch conversation class** that target the development of students' social language

(4) a **performance workshop** that targets the development of students' self-confidence and artistic knowledge.

Typical Daily Schedule

Monday-Thursday

8:30-10:15 Content-Based Language Education classes
10:30-12:15 Literacy workshop with extended reading in ESL library
Lunch (TBA depending on free lunch Schedule)
12:15-1:15 Lunch/conversation classes with College Students
1:15-2:30 Literacy workshop with extended reading in ESL library

*guest speakers will be scheduled during lunch conversation classes on some certain days
TBA

Fridays

8:30-10:30 English language development classes
10:30-2:30 Field trip

The academy features an inspirational line-up of **guest speakers** who will speak about the Habits of Mind themes. Some of the guests from last summer included: Moise Fokou, NFL Titans linebacker and immigrant from Cameroon and other role models in professional fields.

Field trips to places like the Aquarium, JFK Library, Rowing on the Charles, etc. will help to expand students' knowledge of content and themes covered in the core classes. Students will go on a university campus field trip to Boston University, where they will be welcomed by the Director of the Thurman Center, brought on a campus tour, and provided with a guest lecture over lunch by the Dean of the BU School of Education.

The academy will begin with a "kickoff" performance by Dr. Linda Nathan and the Center for the Arts in Boston. The purpose of this performance is to both help students to start to interpret the academy theme and habits of mind as well as serve as a model of the type of performance that they will do for their final capstone performance of learning.

Curriculum and Instruction via a Content-Based Approach

The content-based (Brinton, 2003; Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Snow, 2001), integrated skills curriculum emphasizes the development of language, literacy, habits of mind and intercultural skills across content areas, enabling students to expand both their linguistic and academic knowledge. The overarching academy theme is *Reach for the Stars: Navigate Your Way to Success* and all curricular texts, activities, and experiences will build on that theme. Instructors will guide, monitor, and assess students in a variety of relevant and meaningful activities aimed to develop their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English while broadening and deepening their knowledge of and curiosity about topics in social studies, English language arts, math, science, health/wellness, and the arts. In addition to providing authentic, relevant language learning experiences, the curricular combination of guest lectures, field trips, and college visits aims to help students make real world content connections and promote college and career-readiness. Based on the principles of transformative pedagogy (Cummins, 2000; Cummins, 2009), the curriculum aims to *empower* and *engage* students through dialogic learning experiences, critical reflection activities, and experiential learning opportunities.

In a co-teaching instructional model comprised of Boston University ELL instructional leaders paired with Malden middle school mainstream and SEI/ESL teachers, students will be provided with a wide array of learning opportunities tailored and differentiated to meet their unique learning needs. In a safe, friendly, student-centered learning environment that values the assets, contributions, and potential of every learner, the curriculum is designed to celebrate students' cultural and linguistic diversity and incorporate their pluralistic backgrounds and experiences into the learning experiences. The curricular opportunities for critical reflection and metacognition will help students discover their own learning styles, set goals and monitor their own learning, and acquire effective study skills that will be valuable throughout their lives. Informed by the latest developments in English language development research and guided by WIDA and common core standards, a wide array of evidence-based, highly effective instructional strategies will be used to promote the development of students' language, literacy, and critical thinking skills.

Such strategies include:

- Integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing activities
- Cooperative learning tasks (role plays, debates, panel discussions, fishbowl discussions, town hall meetings)
- Thoughtful/flexible grouping techniques
- Learning stations
- Inquiry-based learning via field trip visits to cultural and educational sites connected to curricular themes
- Literacy circles
- Tiered instruction to accommodate differing readiness levels
- Guest lectures
- Information-processing strategies (KWL charts, graphic organizers, scaffolding, reciprocal teaching)
- Journals
- Oral language development through songs, dramatizing poetry (poetry slam night), choral reading, tape-recording learners' field trip travel logs, debates, tape-recording of students' narrative book series
- Literacy development through freewriting, dialogue and buddy journals, phonics instruction, sight words, words families, life murals, balanced instruction via modeling, scaffolding, literacy circles, independent and extended reading opportunities, adapting stories into plays for videotape

The key outcome of the proposed BU/Malden Reach for the Stars Academy is to serve as a specific intervention tailored to the unique educational needs of ELLs. Through the proposed content-based, integrated skills curriculum, students will develop their English language and literacy skills, improve overall comprehension and performance in core subjects, and increase college and career-readiness. Students will take an initial placement test to determine their language proficiency and identify their individual language, literacy, and learning needs. Ongoing formative and summative assessments will be used to monitor their development. Rubrics, portfolios, reflection journals, samples of written work, and presentations will also be used to document their language and literacy gains.

Professional Development/Coaching

Strengthening teaching for ELLs is a critical factor for closing the achievement gap. The proposed program will provide ongoing professional development/coaching aimed at training Malden SEI and content teachers in effective strategies for addressing the needs of ELLs across content areas, establishing a strong foundation of knowledge upon which to base practice in the enrichment academy and beyond. The first phase of the project will include a blended professional development

seminar with both online modules and a mandatory three day professional orientation for academy instructors. This professional development is designed to enhance teachers' understanding of foundational concepts in secondary ELL learning and teaching, provide continued training on the WIDA standards, help teachers to create Amplified Model Performance Indicators that are tailored to their students' ELD levels, and review strategies to deliver high quality instruction and assessment. This will be followed by weekly instructional conversation meetings during the academy's duration as well as a Fall 2014 in-practice follow-up. The first phase of this teacher preparation model involves online learning of second language learning and teaching theories, principles, and practice and an in-depth review of WIDA and common core standards. This will be combined with a mandatory 3 day intensive staff orientation aimed at preparing BU instructional leaders, Malden SEI and/or mainstream teachers, and BU student volunteers for effective instruction in the summer academy. Throughout the course of the academy, instructional leaders will guide, support, and model instruction for participating Malden teachers. In addition, the Academic Program Director will facilitate structured weekly instructional conversation/case study analyses and in practice follow-up. Research indicates that teacher quality plays a critical role in the academic success of ELLs and this component of the proposal aims to help Malden teachers gain knowledge and practice in evidence-based strategies for addressing the needs of ELLs.

Through a professional learning community and co-teaching model, Malden teachers and BU student tutors will expand their knowledge of and competence in effective ESL instructional strategies for delivering core curriculum to students in sheltered and/or mainstream contexts. Upon completion of all requirements, Malden teachers will earn SEI salary credits and *PDPs*.

Parent Education

The proposed program will host a bilingual orientation for parents/guardians that provides them with training on how to promote academic success for their children in U.S. schools. Translators will be available in the languages represented in the district. Parents will acquire skills and knowledge necessary to participate in their children's educational process. Topics will include: navigating the U.S. school system, tips for promoting their child's academic progress, school resources, parentteacher conferences, standardized testing, the college application process, and information on the benefits of reading at home.

Instructional Strategies in the Language Education block

Students will read narrative and informational texts across the curriculum that relate to the weekly themes. The primary goal of this class is to provide students with opportunities to accelerate their academic English language development while building and deepening their knowledge of core subjects. Each lesson plan was aligned with grade level common core and WIDA standards. The following instructional strategies were used in this class:

Content and Language Objectives: Teachers introduced the daily language and content objectives at the beginning of each class. The GELL program's content-based approach consisted of the integration language development, critical thinking skills, intercultural skills, and content area knowledge for optimal learning and for the promotion of college and career readiness.

Critical Reading Strategies: Active engagement with the text is the key to intellectual growth and academic success. Students in the GELL program focus on the following reading strategies to bolster reading comprehension skills and critical analysis skills: 1) **Preview the text** (layout; headings; subheadings; genre; about the author; conventions of discourse). 2) **Annotate the text.** 3) **Outline; Summarize; Analyze the text.** 4) **Examine the rhetorical techniques used in texts.** 5) **Contextualize:** When was it written? Where was it published? What is the cultural, education, and political background of the author? 6) **Compare and contrast** course readings to other course readings 7) **Make connections** between the text and program lectures, other course readings, fieldtrips, current events, and personal experiences.

Process Writing: Students engage in a variety of writing assignments related to the GELL program's themes, course content, program lectures, and field trips that involved a process of idea generation (or brainstorming), outlining, drafting; peer-editing; teacher-editing; revising; and self-editing. Writing assignments included the following: 1) "I am" poem 2) "How To/Process" paragraph with topic sentence, supporting sentences, and closing sentence 3) Cause & Effect Paragraph with topic sentences, supporting sentences, and closing sentence 4) Five-Paragraph Personal Essay including a clear introduction, body (with supporting examples and detailed descriptions), and conclusion 5) Summaries and outlines of course readings. Additionally, every day class begin with a "Do Now," an impromptu free-writing exercise *to aid students in developing writing fluency and to prepare students for the subsequent class activities.*

Fishbowl Discussions: These class discussions are based on critical thinking questions related to the text. In some cases, the teacher provided the questions. Other times, students craft the questions themselves. The students who observe the discussion (observers of the "fishbowl") monitor members of the group (discussants inside the fishbowl) for one of the following aspects, and provided oral feedback immediately after the discussion: 1) reference to textual evidence by discussants 2) pronunciation points such as voice projection, vowel/consonant sounds, thought-group linking and pausing, and stress in words 3) grammatical accuracy such as subject-verb agreement 4) groups dynamics such as participation, active listening skills, and respect for all group members.

This exercise aided students in improving textual analysis, communication, and language skills – as they became more aware of effective discussion strategies.

Public Speaking: Students practice giving presentations on a variety of topics related to the GELL course themes. *Student build their confidence, overcome speech anxiety, focus on presenting their ideas in an organized manner, and improve their use of body language.* They are expected to speak in front of the class audience on a daily basis. These skills are explicitly emphasized as being important components for college and career readiness. Students participate in both individual and group presentations, which were followed by peer critiquing sessions. 1) *“How To” Speech* with visual aids 2) *Recitation of “I Am” poem* followed by a question and answer session facilitated by the presenter 3) *Informative Speech* on an environmental issue, followed by a proposed solution 4) *Synthesis Presentation* in which students linked music lyrics of their choice with a course theme (empathy; perseverance; etc.) and one of the GELL program lectures 5) *Personal Speech* about an inspirational figure in the student’s life 6) *Informative Speech* on a human rights issue

Group Roles: In group oriented class tasks, students assume and rotate different roles on a daily basis as a way to stay engaged and take responsibility for their learning. Group roles consist of the following: 1) note-taker/summarizer 2) spokesperson 3) facilitator 4) language monitor 5) timekeeper

Roundtable Discussion: Students engage in roundtable discussions in which they are responsible for summarizing the key points of a text and for providing brief personal interpretations of significant passages from the text. Text-based academic discussions followed these preliminary steps.

Academic Debates: Students are assigned to a team and a position on a controversial issue related to the GELL course material. During the debate, students have the opportunity to engage in rehearsed speaking (in presenting their evidence-based prepared points. Students also engage in spontaneous speaking during the crossfire portion of the debate. The following skills are emphasized: 1) the ability to speak persuasively and assertively, with appropriate variety in pitch and rate of speech 2) effective body language: eye-contact; gestures; and enthusiasm 3) correct application of pre-taught vocabulary related to the debate topic.

Create Your Own Dictionary: In the Vocabulary Section of their GELL binders, students compile vocabulary that they learn during the morning classes. Students set goals for learning at least ten new words per week. Students are provided with graphic organizers to help them “own the words.” For each word they have to provide a definition, part of speech, antonym, synonym, an original sentence with the word, and a drawing/image to remind students of the meaning of the word.

Learning Stations: Learning stations that target different skills and modalities are periodically set up in the classroom to peak student interest and offer multiple entry points.

Instructional Strategies in the Literacy Block

The Novel

The featured novel for Malden's 2013 Academy literature block was *We Beat the Streets*, the story of three at-risk adolescents who overcome extraordinary obstacles and go on to become successful doctors. This inspirational true story has at its heart a "pact" between the childhood friends that strengthens them against the ever-present lure of gang membership, drug abuse and crime that infects their urban community. Instructional activities in the literacy block included:

Character analyses: Students were encouraged to consider the characters as multidimensional human beings with the capacity for making a range of choices and decisions. With prompts from the teacher, students constructed detailed "background" information for the characters that aided subsequent discussions about the complexity of human behavior.

Making predictions and drawing inferences: Higher order analytical thinking skills were employed as students responded to teacher prompts.

Connecting text to self, to other texts, and to community and world: Students used this familiar approach to critically reflect upon and relate the text on multiple levels.

Reader's Theater: Teachers and students co-created a series of short scripts that evolved from scenes in the novel. Specifically, the scenes were teacher and student ideas of conversations that *could* happen based on the novel's actual events and characters. The scenes were acted out (and captured on iPad) by students, teachers, and arts staff members on the school auditorium stage.

Student choice: Teachers selected days where students were allowed to read independently, with peers, or with a teacher as opposed to as a whole group. Whole group discussions were often configured in a circle, with a student leader reading aloud while traversing the circle.

Comprehension games: Students were challenged to respond to leveled questions about the novel using a "Jeopardy" approach.

Vocabulary development: Strategies for tackling new vocabulary in context were introduced/reinforced. Teachers modeled good reading strategies throughout the course of the Academy.

Expressing ideas through art: Students used drawings to render their understanding of a particular person or event from the story.

Technology use: Students used the *Smart Pen* and iPads to complete small group discussion activities related to the broader themes of the Academy (to include field trips and guest speakers—see below). Students were assigned specific roles within the small groups.

Brief and Debrief Field Trips/Guest Speakers: A secondary objective of the literature block was to prepare students for upcoming field trips and incoming guest speakers as well as to “debrief” post event. In keeping with the constructivist, cooperative models used with the novel, students were asked to use background knowledge as a starting point to class discussions. Teachers used an informal circle discussion format with technology support via the whiteboard/internet. To build interest, students were given specific objectives for each event, such as the development of an opinion or a question that emerged from the event.

Assessments:

Students will demonstrate their knowledge growth and language development via a variety of formative and summative assessments. The final performance/celebration of learning will include: (a) reader's theater excerpts and interpretations from the novel (b) Poetry slam performance (c) a display of learning portfolios across the room for parents and teachers to discuss and assess

Student Portfolios

These portfolios include examples of student work that demonstrate their content knowledge growth as well as their language and literacy growth. Teachers should encourage students to include a variety of exemplary work.

Capstone Project

During the final capstone project, students are asked to demonstrate their learning across content areas through a multi-modal final capstone performance.

Ongoing Data collection

Teachers monitored and collected data on student learning daily in class in order to be able to scaffold and differentiate instruction according to student needs/interest.